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LIBRARY BUILDING RENOVATIONS – CRUCIAL COLLABORATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper shares how important cross-sectional collaboration is to ensuring the successful planning of academic library buildings and facilities. The focus is on the nature of collaboration with internal stakeholders in the various stages of the process. It highlights the purpose of the collaboration in and at each stage, lists the relevant stakeholders and their roles, highlights the challenges and ultimately concludes with the benefits of the collaboration.

The specific relationships and agreements with internal stakeholders such as library staff, students, academics, Information and Communication Technology, Procurement and University Estates are presented. The paper briefly refers to collaboration with external stakeholders (architects, other librarians, the project manager and vendors).

The nature of the collaboration during the initial research phase, consultation, establishment of requirements, compilation of specifications, determination of costs, compiling of proposal, presentation and motivation are discussed.

The paper is based on a practical project, but refers to valuable research which informed the planning, contracts, tender process, procurement, relocation process, etc. Attention is given to technology requirements in an Open Distance e-Learning Library. Although the focus is on the comprehensive renovation project of the libraries at the University of South Africa, the information is relevant for residential institutions that plan to renovate their online teaching and learning environments.

Unisa is a comprehensive higher education institution that offers an extensive selection of courses that range from first degrees to diplomas, certificates, postgraduate degrees and professional qualifications. Unisa offers Open Distance e-Learning to students in South Africa and abroad, and enrolls over 350 000 students which positions Unisa as one of the world's 10 mega universities.

Within the scope of its strategies to improve throughput and retention, to enhance service levels to students and to establish Unisa as the leading provider of ODeL teaching and learning, the University saw the benefits of investing in the renovations of the Muckleneuk and Florida Campus libraries.

KEYWORDS

Collaboration

Library buildings.
Library renovations

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1. Introduction

“We get out of life what we put into it. The way we treat others is the way we ourselves get treated.”
— Ben Carson, *Think Big: Unleashing Your Potential for Excellence*.

Collaboration is a golden thread that enhances the outcomes of projects.

According to the Merriam Webster Online Dictionary and Thesaurus, the origin of the word collaboration is from the Latin “collaboratus”, past participle of *collaborare*, to labor together, from the Latin *com-* + *laborare*, to labor.

There are many definitions and explanations of the concept, but they boil down to indicate the following:

- to work together or jointly with others especially in an intellectual endeavour,
- to cooperate with or to willingly assist an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force, and
- to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected.

Mudd (2009) confirms that working together to share resources, initiate new services and to solve difficult common problems is something in which libraries are experienced. It is also evident that major technological and social changes impact on collaboration between individuals and groups (also beyond library collaboration). Libraries have a long history of collaboration and sharing and may be better-suited than other industries to benefit from increased cooperative opportunities.

These experiences and our acknowledgement of the importance of working together have certainly enhanced the collaboration with other departments in the University to the benefit of the library renovation project at Unisa.

1.1 University of South Africa (Unisa)

The University of South Africa (Unisa) is the largest open distance learning institution in Africa and the longest standing dedicated distance education university in the world. Unisa enrolls nearly one-third of all South African students – more than 350 000 students. (<http://www.unisa.ac.za>).

Unisa was founded in 1873 as the University of the Cape of Good Hope and then became the first public university in the world to teach exclusively by means of distance education in 1946. Unisa is celebrating 140 years in higher education in 2013. Over many years Unisa was perhaps the only university in South Africa to enrol students from all races. This contribution to education is evident in the rich history of our alumni and in the massive and impressive database of alumni. Rooted in South Africa and the African continent, Unisa today can truly claim to be the African university in the service of humanity. (Unisa Vision and Mission).

Unisa has embraced the fact that the University needs to adapt quickly to the fast-paced higher education environment of the 21st Century and this is reflected in the innovations at Unisa. This has also generated the need for the renovation project under discussion in this paper.

Unisa offers a comprehensive range of study choices and covers various disciplines including the humanities, business and management, law and criminal justice, agriculture and the environmental sciences, engineering and technology. The qualifications range from short courses, certificate programmes and diplomas to three- and four-year degrees, masters and doctoral degrees. As one of the leading research institutions on the continent, the University has won numerous awards, recognitions and honours.

1.2 Unisa Library

As the largest academic library in Africa, the Unisa Library is also one of the best-endowed with information resources, information technology and expert staff. The Unisa Library was established in 1946 when Unisa introduced distance learning as a mode of tuition. The Library experienced a period of rapid growth, with the printed book collection now totalling 2.7 million items. The Library offers access to more than 100 000 electronic books, 96 904 e-journal titles, 468 individual databases and 3 65 print journal subscriptions.. Both the e-journals and the growing collection of electronic books (e-books) are available to Unisa students and staff 24/7 via the Internet, regardless of the user's physical location.

The Library and its 9 fully-functional branch libraries all actively support the teaching, research and community service programmes of the University within the challenges of open distance learning.

The Unisa Library is the first library on the continent to introduce self-help services and stock management utilising Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technologies on a large scale. The major goal was to improve client satisfaction by making self-service possible, so that clients are able to issue and return books themselves.

Striving to offer services and facilities of a high standard, the Library assessed its current facilities in Muckleneuk and Florida which were opened in the Eighties and Nineties respectively. This was done by taking into consideration the changes in technology, evolving client needs, growth in student numbers, progress in the profession and the University's agenda for transformation. After thorough research and a broad consultation process the Library initiated a comprehensive and radical renovation project for its libraries in Muckleneuk and Florida. Building new libraries was not an option and it was evident that collaboration with all stakeholders would be crucial to planning the renovations.

Key to the success of the project is flexibility, long-term planning for future technologies, changing library collections and changing user demographics / user needs. Future expansion, academic and research requirements and staff needs were integrated in the planning that was benchmarked against world renowned renovation projects. It includes inspiring user spaces, efficient work and pause areas, interactive exhibition areas, and state of the art facilities for clients with special needs, etc.

From the outset it was clear that collaboration between various stakeholders and the library is crucial to the successful outcome of the project. The paper will focus on the collaboration with various stakeholders in the different phases of the project.

2. Collaboration

2.1 Libraries and collaboration

Mudd (2009): 115 indicates that while the challenges facing libraries are sometimes daunting, they do oftentimes lead to collaborative solutions. In any collaborative initiative, participants need to know what they should offer / commit to and what will they receive / benefit. Even in basic joint ventures, each participant should feel as if he or she gains something unique from the collaboration. In terms of the renovation project of the Unisa libraries it was clear that collaborating on the compilation of requirements and ultimately the specifications for the project would benefit all participants. This is specifically true in terms of improved working environments, improved services to clients and state-of-the art facilities for the University.

In many businesses, cooperation is not always a natural tendency or supported by a comfortable environment. Unlike many other industries, though, cooperation is fundamental to the work that libraries do. When institutions work together to save money and time, to reach users more efficiently and to deliver the unique resources that libraries, museums and archives provide, they reiterate and prove the value of the cooperative model. This was also fundamental for the project to plan the renovations of the Unisa libraries.

Hutton (2012: 149) indicates that collaboration with campus partners is essential in providing a holistic approach to meeting student needs. It is important to identify the partners and to collaborate very closely to achieve the required results. Considering the dynamic nature and fast-paced change in higher education it is important to plan suitable facilities, technologies and support structures to meet and anticipate the ever-changing needs of the 21st century learner. This cannot be done in isolation by one stakeholder as will be demonstrated in this paper.

In the process to renovate the Larsen room in the Lamont Library at Harvard University, different studies were carried out to determine the requirements. Close collaboration between library and planning staff and students resulted in a participatory design workshop. In another study, collaboration with faculty members (who had taught in the room) involved two focus groups. Valuable information was gathered in these collaborative sessions to ensure suitable renovations. This included, among others things, requirements in terms of the use of the room, hardware and software requirements, teaching equipment, furniture requirements, etc. Farwell Blake, L. Other examples of collaboration between library and clients to design ideal study spaces are the renovations of the Claremont Colleges, the Canaday Library at Bryn Mawr College, and the Theodore McKeldin Library at the University of Maryland. In most of these examples, participatory design project teams were used to inform the requirements and ensure suitable renovations.

2.2 Collaboration at Unisa

The Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Unisa, Prof Mandla Makhanya, introduced the theme of the mosaic to the University and has spoken about this on a number of occasions. In referring to the University and its rich history, he uses the analogy of a mosaic in which the separate mosaic pieces represent brokenness, but when brought together that brokenness contributes beauty, brilliance, diversity and richness and “fit” to the artist’s picture. A closer look at the mosaic will reveal its flaws, but with some distance the beauty and the coherence of the picture can be admired. Professor Makhanya encourages the people of the University to collaborate and work together to face our many challenges without lose sight of the endless potential that resides within us.

2.3 Concept of Ubuntu

One cannot refer to collaboration without reflecting on the African concept of *ubuntu*. It reflects the very essence and importance of collaboration because it means: "I am what I am because of who we all are". Tutu (1999) explains that a person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others. In collaborating with one another they affirm one another and do not feel threatened that others are able and good, and is based upon a proper degree of self-assurance. This comes from the knowledge that a person belongs within a greater whole and together we can achieve more. *Ubuntu* is the essence of being human. It indicates that you cannot exist as a human in isolation and it refers to the interconnectedness of people. *Ubuntu* is an African word for humanity and it is certainly the ultimate in working together and achieving together.

3 Collaboration in different phases of the project

The Unisa Library is well established and resourced. With the rapid growth in client numbers, changed client needs, changes in the profession and especially enhancements in technologies the need to improve the physical facilities became evident. A major consideration was the need for academic staff to be served in terms of support for teaching and research by the two Libraries. The Library in Muckleneuk serves the College of Law, College of Human Sciences, College of Economic and Management Sciences and the College of Education. The Florida Library serves the College of Science, Engineering and Technology and the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. In recent years the Libraries have undergone numerous small and large renovations and changes. Despite the effort to respond to the needs of library users, the work has been piecemeal and not satisfactorily.

For example a dedicated research space was introduced that is being used very well. However, a major renovation of the two Libraries was required to cope with the changing environment and demands on the services.

3.1 Research on academic library building requirements

A literature survey on the impact of the changing environment for academic libraries on library buildings and requirements was done. The focus was on renovations of current facilities as building new libraries was not an option. Based on the outcomes and information gathered in the literature survey, the Unisa Library undertook visits to academic and special libraries that have been renovated recently. This collaboration with external stakeholders proved to be very valuable and the outcomes were integrated in the comprehensive set of requirements.

3.2 Collaboration with library staff and clients

Based on the information gathered in the research for the project a framework was compiled to direct the consultations with clients. The following stakeholders were identified for this phase of the project: Library staff members, academic staff (Colleges) and students. The collaboration in this phase was focused on gathering information on the needs of the Library staff, academics and students.

With regards to the requirements of the Library staff, studies done on the impact of the physical environment on performance as well as consultation with library staff informed the draft specifications on the workplace areas. This internal collaboration between the project leader and Library staff was the first and very important in the series of collaborations to finalise the specifications of the project.

Rodley (2006) emphasizes physical work environment aspects that have a strong influence on how we experience our work. Small physical elements can have a big impact on productivity, staff turnover and

job satisfaction. These aspects include climate regulation, quality of light, placement of workstations, noise levels, furniture, décor, plants, art works, etc. A positive working environment is indeed influenced by the quality of the buildings, interior decoration, cleanliness and the security of personnel and property.

The physical environment of the workplace impacts on the performance of staff. Therefore the collaboration with staff members in the Library in this phase of the project was very important to ensure the specifications and requirements for the renovations are suitable.

Information gathered focused on the workspace requirements, workflow, pause area requirements and projected growth in staff members. Projections as to the growth of the collections and the security and climate requirements for the collections were also considered.

Consultation with clients was essential in order to establish the needs and preferences of academics and students. The structure of the Senate Library Committee was used for this purpose. This Committee has the representation of Students, Academics, Management and Administration. Collaboration with these stakeholders resulted in valuable information integrated in the specifications and requirements for the project.

General requirements in terms of Occupational Health and Safety requirements, green building requirements and requirements for staff and clients with special needs were integrated with the requirements identified in the research and consultative processes. Collaboration in this phase with the university's Advocacy and Resource Centre for Students with Disabilities (ARCSWiD) was very valuable to ensure that the specifications are suitable.

3.3 Collaboration during the tender process

Based on the outcomes of the research and consultations within the Library and with clients, a detailed set of specifications and requirements were compiled. Collaboration with the Department University Estates in this phase was focused on integrating input and recommendations to finalise the specifications. The project manager collaborated with University Estates to embark on a comprehensive process to invite tenders from architects for the project. Within the policies and procedures of the University, the proposal for the tender was presented to the Tender Committee and approved by top management. An information session was scheduled for interested companies and tenders received were adjudicated by the Tender Working Committee. The successful appointment was a result of the positive collaboration and teamwork with the various stakeholders.

3.4 Collaboration with stakeholders on requirements

Following the appointment of the successful Architect a Steering Committee was established to start the planning process. This facilitated collaboration with stakeholders to ensure relevant planning for the project. Library Management, University Estates, Department of ICT and the Architects were represented in the Steering Committee. Discussions on the specifications and requirements informed the draft plans.

Specific focus was confirmed on the following requirements for the project. The facilities need to provide services according to the strategies of the university and should provide suitable facilities and space for clients involved in teaching and learning as well as research in these two Libraries. The project requires a visionary team with a deep understanding of the stated needs, in interaction with the Library and the University's vision of future teaching and learning and research requirements. Collaboration with all stakeholders is key to the project.

With regards to the space planning, building design and flexibility are key elements of the project (planning for future technology, changing library collections, possible future expansion, changing user demographics, etc). Aspects to consider include user demographics, standards and guidelines, design for users, collections and staff.

With regards to the user service areas, modern academic libraries make provision for the following distinct areas according to the service requirements of the clients in addition to the other spaces in the facilities:

- an information commons (where students access online information for assignments and preparations for exams),
- a learning commons (where students work in groups, tutors interact with students for the purposes of completing group assignments and work on special software to enhance teaching and learning; this is usually a more informal space with a variety of comfortable seats, desks and set ups, and
- a research commons for research purposes.

The Muckleneuk and Florida Libraries would need to make provision for an information commons and a research commons, whilst learning commons for these regions are set up on the Sunnyside Campus and in the G-Block on the Florida Campus.

The following principles were identified as key to the project and collaboration and consultation in these areas proved very important.

- Complete and holistic redesign of the two Libraries recast as dedicated teaching and learning libraries with a focus on research.
- A modern and stylish 20 year design with maximum flexibility looking into an unknowable but very different digital future. Timeless and durable finishes (in relation to available annual maintenance budget) with minimum maintenance required.
- Redesign based on a vision and understanding of future teaching and learning and research requirements. It is not merely the redecoration of the current facilities, but a renovation with a conceptual model of 21st Century research and library and information service (flexibility in terms of facilities, venues and furniture).
- The new Unisa Libraries should be re-designed on a knowledge generation and creation model not on information resources model. This will mean that the researcher and/or college/discipline are central to the services and it should be stimulating to development and creativity.
- Students and academics working in diverse collaborative ways and various options and facilities for meetings, seminars, lecture, discussions, reading should be provided.
- Students' and academics' expectations for reliable, pervasive technology should be considered.

A comprehensive set of requirements was compiled based on the research, visits to renovated academic libraries and in collaboration with the stakeholders. Some of the major requirements, among others, were the following.

- The current entrance to the Muckleneuk Library is not central to the campus and should be redone completely. It should be inviting, visible and easily accessible.
- The reception area should be modelled on examples such as Bibliotheca Alexandrina – to facilitate all activities in terms of general enquiries, issue of equipment, registration, self-help stations, issue desks, general waiting lounge, security (control room / projection cameras interfaced with the alarm system).
- The new facilities should be environmentally friendly in terms of all operations. They should be as environmentally stable and energy-efficient as possible. All aspects of OHS requirements to be observed.
- Accessible facilities for clients with special needs. The needs of the physically disabled should be considered in all areas (evacuation, lifts, toilet, access to collections, movement within the building, etc).
- The electrical and technology infrastructure should accommodate current and future stations, equipment and furniture. Optimal flexibility should be considered.
- Research behaviour which has changed and will change radically with new technologies and research methods. Consideration to complex building use patterns (times / requirements, etc.)
- The re-designed research library is a Library 2.0 facility, primarily a cyberlibrary with a web presence, but also expressed as a Library 2.0 set of research spaces and support spaces. Library 1.0 is a passive one way imparting of information, rules, services and spaces from library to client.
- A variety of facilities / spaces should be provided for in terms of workspace, offices, information desks, self-help services, research areas, staff facilities, seminar facilities, discussion rooms, etc.

3.5 Collaboration with stakeholders on plans

Based on the discussions and collaboration with stakeholders represented in the Steering Committee, draft plans were drawn up. These were presented to all stakeholders for consultation. This included sessions with all directorates in the Library (crucial collaboration to ensure effective renovations to ensure a conducive working environment and enhanced performance. Sessions were also held with representatives of the Senate Library Committee (students, academics, management, etc.). Input and recommendations gathered from these sessions were discussed at the Steering Committee (Library Management, ICT, University Estates and Architects). Updates were done and the process was repeated until the final plans were submitted for approval by Management and Council.

5. Conclusion

The first phase of the project (research, consultation, plans, approval and funding) has been completed successfully. This was a long process and this was partly due to the nature and extent of the project. Furthermore, the consultations and collaboration with a large range of stakeholders also took some time. However, following this approach contributed to the success of this part of the project. This will also be the approach for the implementation of the project and collaboration with staff and clients will be crucial to communicate the progress of and information about the project which will be finalised in 2015.

The approach followed in this project confirms the well-known saying by Helen Keller: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much".

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